

Project Name: **Willow Creek Springs Hazardous Fuel Reduction**

Applicant: **City of Portola**



Narrative Description

Detailed Project Description

Project Summary: Approximately 168 acres of forest land owned by the City of Portola will receive hazardous fuel reduction creating a more healthy forest. Activities will target removal, modification, and rearrangement of concentrated surface ladder fuels such as brush and suppressed trees. Treatment will utilize biomass removal/thinning from below, mechanical mastication, and hand thinning methods only.

Project Description: In accordance with Prop 84 mandates and the goals of SNC, this project will:

1. reduce the risk of wildfires
2. decrease wildfire spread from spotting
3. lessen fire intensity
4. protect the adjacent National Forest
5. enhance forest health
6. protect local and California water project watershed resources, including water quality, wildlife habitat, and scenic quality

SNC's **triple bottom line** of environmental, economic, and social well-being, will be met to:

1. protect, conserve, and restore the region's physical resources
2. aid in the preservation of working landscapes
3. reduce the risk of natural disasters, such as wildfires
4. protect and improve water and air quality
5. assist the regional economy



Approximately 168 acres of forest will receive hazardous fuel reduction. The site is Sierra Mixed Conifer young growth forest with sagebrush and riparian inclusion habitat. Forested portions have a variety of conifer age and crown classes, creating horizontal and vertical continuity. Dead and down woody debris from natural dead fall/mortality exists in moderate levels, creating excessive surface fuels. The site is adjacent (on 3 sides) to the existing 3,100 acre USFS Humbug DFPZ. Treatment of the City parcels will directly benefit the efficacy of the USFS DFPZ. The FHSZ for the 162.78 acre parcel is "Very High"; the 5 acre parcel is within the FRA.

Activities will target removal, modification, and rearrangement of concentrated surface fuels and ladder fuels. Treatment will use biomass removal/thinning from below, mechanical mastication, and hand thinning methods, including prescribed fire, in accordance with the CA Forest Practices Act and the CAL FIRE permit. It is expected that there will be revenue from the biomass/sawlog activity in the amount of \$30,600 (not included in the project budget). Revenue generated will go back into maintenance of the property.

The project will encourage watershed restoration. Willow Creek springs are on the project site and provide water to the City of Portola. Undeveloped springs flow to Willow Creek, a tributary to the Middle Fork of the Feather River and ultimately, Lake Oroville. Implementation of the project will reduce current issues of trespassing to cut firewood and improve the watershed and overall site.

Goals/Results: Treatment will preserve and improve forest health by reducing risk, impacts and intensity of large fires, preserving and restoring ecosystem function, and improving the watershed. The dense forest conditions in the project area, with dead trees and dry vegetation, make the area prone to the risk of a stand-replacing catastrophic wildfire.

The City's Willow Springs provides a portion of its water supply. The project will reduce sediment to Willow Creek and the amount of stormwater runoff being discharged. Implementation of the project will reduce the impact of trespassing to cut firewood, improving the watershed and overall site.

The project will directly benefit the regional economy by adding 9 full time jobs (50 days) and will increase recycled product available to the local mill business. Plumas County's unemployment rate is 14.5%; Portola is 13.2% (November 2011 CA EDD). Increasing employment in the region will be a boost to the unemployed and underemployed, and help to stabilize existing businesses.

Scope of Work: This project will treat 168 acres, complementing the 3,100 acre Humbug DFPZ. Treatment will include 100 acres of biomass removal, 25 acres of hand thinning, 30 acres of mastication, and 13 acres "out"/no treatment. The biomass removal is estimated to generate 600 BDT of biomass chips and 35 MBF of sawlogs, totaling revenue of \$30,600. Any revenue will go back into maintenance of the property. In accordance with the project's CAL FIRE permit, harvesting will be permitted in amounts less than 10 percent of the average volume per acre, under the supervision of a RPF.

Location: The City of Portola owns 2 parcels (162.78 and 5 acres) surrounded by Plumas Natl Forest. Willow Creek and the Willow Springs are located on the larger of these 2 parcels. Further, the subject parcels are directly adjacent (on 3 sides) to the existing USFS Humbug DFPZ.



Environmental Setting: The area is Sierra Mixed Conifer young growth forest with sagebrush and riparian inclusion habitat. It includes the City's Willow Springs and Willow Creek. Forested areas exhibit a variety of conifer age and crown classes, creating a horizontal and vertical continuity of fuels. Dead and down woody debris from natural dead fall/mortality exists in moderate levels.

Workplan and Schedule Narrative

The workplan for the hazardous fuels reduction project is expected to take less than 2 years to complete. Steps include development of a Request for Proposals, providing administrative support, accomplishing the treatments, and finalizing the grant.

Grant activity will start, after the agreement is signed, with the City of Portola retaining a RPF to determine treatments, including biomass harvesting, mastication, and hand treatments for the project. All permitting processes (CAL FIRE and CEQA) are complete. The City of Portola will establish a maintenance fund to treat regrowth as necessary on City property. The RPF and City staff will prepare a Request for Proposals and openly solicit for licensed, experience, and qualified contractors to accomplish the treatments. The selected contractor will perform the necessary treatment in accordance with California Forest Practices Act regulations.

TASK	TIMEFRAME
City of Portola retains a Registered Professional Forester to determine treatments, including biomass harvesting, mastication and hand treatments.	Complete; in application
City of Portola completes CEQA Categorical Exemption filed with Plumas County.	Complete; in application
RPF completes Exemption with a CAL FIRE <i>Dead, Dying, or Diseased; Fuelwood or Split Products Exemption</i> .	Complete; in application
Grant authorization	June 2012
RPF and City of Portola establish pre & post photo-monitoring points.	By November 2012
The City of Portola is responsible for establishing a maintenance fund to treat hazardous fuels on City property, in accordance with the Long Term Management Plan.	By November 2012
PRF and City of Portola prepare a Request for Proposals.	By November 2012



City of Portola (through the Registered Professional Forester) openly solicits for licensed, experienced, and qualified contractors to accomplish the treatments.	By November 2012
Six Month Progress Report	December 2012
Retain contractors perform the necessary treatments following California Forest Practice Rules, required by the Board of Forestry.	By January 2013
Treatment – Biomass harvesting on 100 acres with follow-up surface fuel treatment where needed.	By December 2013; Six to eighteen months post funding (field season dependent)
Treatment – Mechanical mastication or hand treatments on 55 acres.	By December 2013; Six to eighteen months post funding (field season dependent)
Six Month Progress Reports; oversee treatment contracts, forest product receipts and operations	June 2013 December 2013 June 2014
Provide final reports	June 2014

Restrictions, Technical/Environmental Documents and Agreements Narrative

Restrictions/Agreements: There are no property restrictions and/or agreements that could adversely impact project completion.

Regulatory Requirements/Permits: A CAL FIRE Exemption (“Dead, Dying, or Diseased Fuelwood or Split Products Exemption” has been approved.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA): The proposed hazardous fuel reduction activities have been reviewed by City staff and deemed to be Categorically exempt pursuant to Section 15304, Minor Alterations to Land. The project consists of minor alterations in the conditions of land and/or vegetation that does not involve the removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry purposes. The project will restore native vegetation, reduce fuel loads, and control invasive species. No ground disturbance will occur to result in significant impact to the environment.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): NEPA review is not required for this project as it is not on federal lands. CEQA review has been completed.



Organizational Capacity

The City of Portola provides general government services in the form of City administration, finance, building inspection, public works, and community development. Services include fire protection, EMS, water treatment and distribution, wastewater collection and treatment, storm drainage, park and recreation services, road maintenance, snow removal, animal control, parking enforcement, and code enforcement. The City of Portola has a permanent staff of 8.

For this project, the Planner and Public Works Manager would manage the day-to-day activities. The City Manager, Leslie Tigan, will provide project oversight. She has had oversight over numerous similar projects. Karen Downs, Planner, will be the primary administrator for this project. She has experience administering a variety of grants, including Caltrans, CDBG, a Disaster Recovery Initiative Grant, and a Prop 50 project. Todd Roberts, Public Works Director provides construction management for the City's public works projects.

Cooperation and Community Support

This project will have a positive impact on the region, including Plumas County, Plumas County Fire Safe Council, and the Forest Service. Letters of support are included from PCFSC, Plumas County, CAL FIRE, and the US Forest Service. City staff consulted with Mr. Jerry Hurley, Coordinator, Plumas County Fire Safe Council in the development of this project. Discussion began when the City started to prioritize watershed restoration and maintenance of the forest area surrounding Willow Creek Springs, in accordance with the City of Portola General Plan. As staff became aware of SNC's funding opportunity, it was possible to include hazardous fuel reduction as a project for the entire 168 acres owned by the City.

Planning and preparation of the Dead, Dying or Diseased; Fuelwood or Split Products Exemption by the project RPF and the CEQA Categorical Exemption was paid for by the City of Portola.

Long-Term Management and Sustainability

This project will cut and remove hazardous fuels, including smaller suppressed trees, brush, other ladder fuels, and dead and down woody debris. A residual stand of the largest, most fire resilient dominant and codominant conifers will remain, which also generally contain the fullest crowns. Retention of these trees will allow for ample shade to continue to hit the forest floor, which will impede the growth of brush and other flammable vegetation as the site will be dominated by conifer cover. In similar local sites, regrowth of brush proved to take at least 5 years, yet with shade canopy form above, the regrowth was significantly reduced and did not establish populations that were an effective hazardous fuel. If needed, follow up treatment such as mechanical mastication could occur where needed. Due to the initial reduction of hazardous fuels, follow up treatment to maintain the site would occur only where needed and would be expected to be very cost effective.



Performance Measures

This project will accomplish the following, as it is implemented:

- **Number of Jobs Created:** This project will directly generate 9.5 FTEs for 50 days (approximately 4,000 hours), and will indirectly assist the regional economy by providing sawlogs and biomass for the local mill, support services for the equipment and laborers performing the treatments, and stabilizing local businesses.
- **Kilowatts of Renewable Energy Production:** Six hundred BDT biomass from this project will go to the SPI co-gen plant in Quincy. This renewable resource contributes towards an overall reduction of power required from non-renewable sources.
- **Acres of Land Improved:** This project phase will create an additional 168 acres of treated land and create a contiguous 3,100 acres of treatment, complementing the Humbug DFPZ. The Fire Hazard Severity Zone (CAL FIRE, November 2007) for the 162.78 acre parcel is “Very High”.

